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ABSTRACT

The study compared nationwide research findings about the districts, supervisors, teachers, programs, and student performance in 642 public school districts with an enrollment of 900 or less to data from a random sample of school districts of similar size in Oregon. Data were gathered from superintendents by questionnaire during the 1982-83 school year. Thirteen of Oregon's 304 school districts, or 100% of those surveyed, responded. Although Oregon's small school districts had lower enrollments, they were larger geographically than such districts nationally. Almost twice as many Oregon districts received state aid as did districts nationally, and the last bond issue averaged over $1,000,000 compared to $716,000 nationally. Superintendents were nearly 20 years younger than superintendents nationally. They had more master's but fewer doctoral or education specialist degrees. Almost 70% combined superintendent and principal duties, a fact reflected in lower salaries. Teacher salaries, however, were slightly higher than average as were teacher/student ratios. Teacher turnover was less than average. Oregon's graduating seniors' performance was not up to the national par. Compared to the average, .8% more continued in technical school and 6% fewer went on to college. Although Oregon's small schools had consistently fewer resource personnel, the curriculum offerings compared well. (SB)

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A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN OREGON COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILIAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

A Report Prepared for the
Oregon Department of Education
November 17, 1983

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OREGON

A descriptive report of K-12 public school districts in Oregon enrolling 900 students or less compared to nationwide research findings for rural school districts of similiar size. Thirteen districts were surveyed in Oregon; 642 districts were surveyed in the national study.

The study gathered data related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs, and student performance. Data was collected during the 1982-83 school year.

A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN OREGON COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

by
Bruce O. Barker and Ivan D. Muse

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, comparatively few educators have taken an interest in the strengths and challenges of America's small/rural schools, despite the fact that almost one-third of America's youngsters attend schools classified as rural (REA News, 1982). With the decline in school consolidation and the current population shift to non-metropolitan areas (Beal, 1975), it is clearly evident that rural schools will continue to play a significant role in the future educational development of a large segment of our society. Currently, very little data are available about rural school systems in our society. This is particularly true of K-12 systems enrolling less than 1,000 students (Nachtigal, 1979).

The purpose of this report is to present major findings of K-12 rural school districts in Oregon with those of a nationwide study completed by Barker (1983), in which descriptive data were collected on K-12 and/or 1-12 rural school systems enrolling 900 students or less. The findings were gathered during the 1982-83 academic year.

METHOD

Using the Education Directory, Fall 1980: Local Education Agencies as a reference, a hand count was made of all K-12 and 1-12 public school districts in the United States which enroll 900 students or less. Of the nation's 15,601 public districts, 4,125 (26.4 percent) were identified as qualifying K-12 or 1-12 systems. In Oregon, 66 qualifying districts were identified. These districts represented 21.7 percent of the state's 304

operating public school districts and enrolled 24,236 students.

Questionnaires were mailed to superintendents of 816 randomly selected districts in the nationwide study. Completed questionnaires were returned from 642 districts (78.7 percent). The same questionnaire was mailed to 13 districts in Oregon, of which 13 responded (100 percent). The questionnaire posed questions related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs and student performance.

FINDINGS

A comparison of the major findings in Oregon with those of the national study are reported in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

Oregon is one of the leading states in the nation in relation to the number of rural districts which make up the state's public school system. It is clearly evident that the operation and management of the small/rural district poses challenges and rewards, in many ways, uniquely different from those of a large urban district, and even many larger rural districts. It is hoped that the information presented herein will assist Oregon educators, and others interested in education, to more knowledgeably enhance the strengths and address the needs of the small/rural districts within the state.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ON K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN OREGON AND THOSE NATIONWIDE, ENROLLING 900 STUDENTS OR LESS. 1983.

Variable	Oregon	Nation
The Rural District		
1. Average student enrollment per district	318	436
2. Average number of schools per district	1.9	2.4
3. Average student enrollment per school	153.4	188.5
4. Average geographical size of district in square miles	484	245
5. Percent of student's bussed to school	66.4	64.4
6. Mean farthest one-way distance students bussed (miles)	21.0	19.0
7. Percent of districts reporting receipt of state aid or funding for small school districts	46.2	24.2
8. Average dollar amount of last bond issue	$1,070,285	$716,000
9. Percent of districts passing last bond issue	76.9	87.5
10. Percent of districts reporting declining enrollments	15.4	36.2
The Superintendent		
1. Average age of superintendent	30.8	47.1
2. Percent of superintendents holding master's as highest degree	84.6	55.4
3. Percent of superintendents holding Ed. Specialist degree	15.4	31.5
4. Percent of superintendents holding doctorate degree	0	13.1
5. Average tenure as superintendent (years)	4.8	8.5
6. Percent of superintendents reporting annual salary in excess of $35,000	30.8	37.4
7. Percent of full-time superintendents	30.8	75.8
8. Percent of superintendent/principal combinations	69.2	20.9
9. Percent of superintendents who worked for district prior to appointment as superintendent	30.8	29.4
The Teachers		
1. Average number of elementary teachers in district	10.4	14.4
2. Average number of secondary teachers in district	11.3	15.7
3. Average teacher/student ratio	1:14.7	1:14.5
4. Percent teacher turnover (1982-83)	5.0	8.6
5. Mean beginning teacher salary (1982-83)	$13,821	$12,492
6. Mean top teacher salary (1982-83)	$21,842	$20,506
7. Mean current teacher salary (1982-83)	$17,912	$16,377

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Oregon	Nation
8. Average number of "steps" to reach top of salary schedule	15.0	14.5
9. Average number of different subject preparations for secondary teachers	4.5	3.5
Student Performance		
1. Mean number of graduating seniors	21.0	34.5
2. Percent of graduating seniors recognized as National Merit Exam Finalists	0	1.0
3. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 25 or above on American College Test (ACT Exam)	2.9	7.5
4. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 1100 or above on Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT Exam)	4.8	2.6
5. Percent of graduating seniors going on to college	32.6	38.6
6. Percent of graduating seniors going to technical school	14.9	14.1
School Programs		
1. Percent of districts exploying either full or part-time, the following resource personnel:		
Special Education	41.6	86.6
School Counselor	66.7	79.4
School Psychologist	8.3	33.8
School Nurse	8.3	45.1
Librarian/Media Specialist	75.0	80.9
Adult Education Director	0	22.0
Community Education Director	0	7.8
Vocational Education Director	8.3	22.0
2. Percent of districts offering the following sports programs:		
Football	92.3	69.2
Basketball	100	100
Baseball	46.2	55.4
Softball	15.4	37.1
Volleyball	100	65.7
Cross Country Track	23.1	23.3
Soccer	7.7	7.0
Wrestling	46.2	25.2
Track and Field	92.3	78.7
Golf	0	22.4
Tennis	7.7	16.3
Swimming	0	3.2
Gymnastics	0	5.9

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Oregon	Nation
3. Percent of districts offering the following courses as a part of their curriculum:		
Spanish	41.7	41.8
German	0	9.7
French	8.3	18.9
Calculus	33.3	35.9
Chemistry	91.7	79.4
Computer Science	75.0	60.3
Electronics	16.7	13.0
Vocational Agriculture	33.3	63.1
Physics	66.7	67.7

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